

Mr. Bernard L. Flanagan
Information
Fish & Wildlife
Room 3004
DO

Baker - Int. 4662



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

For Release to PM's, APRIL 27, 1961

INTERIOR APPROVES PLAN FOR NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE AND PUBLIC RECREATION AREA ON FOSS RESERVOIR IN OKLAHOMA

Approval of a general plan to establish a national wildlife refuge and to provide public recreation opportunities on Foss Reservoir, a major feature of the Washita Basin Project of the Bureau of Reclamation in western Oklahoma, was announced today by Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall. The plan has also been approved by the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Secretary Udall said that the new wildlife area, to be known as the Washita National Wildlife Refuge--situated on the Central Waterfowl Flyway--"will help to preserve and foster migratory waterfowl as an important part of our national heritage." He noted that Foss Reservoir will open up new outdoor recreational opportunities for tourists and other visitors who are thronging to Bureau of Reclamation storage reservoirs in the 17 Western States in increasing numbers every year.

Foss Dam and Reservoir, now being constructed by the Bureau of Reclamation, are scheduled for completion by mid-1962. The reservoir, with a capacity of 430,100 acre-feet of water, will encompass a surface area of approximately 13,100 acres as a major feature of the project's Foss Division in Custer and Washita counties. The wildlife refuge will be located on the upper portion of the reservoir. The lower portion of the reservoir area will be open to the public for recreational purposes.

Commissioner of Reclamation Floyd E. Dominy said that both the refuge and the recreational facilities will be operated so as not to interfere with the essential purposes of the multipurpose Washita Basin Project. The project, with an estimated

total cost of \$37,866,500, has as its primary purpose the utilization of the waters of Cobb Creek and the Washita River for municipal and industrial purposes and for irrigation, and to furnish water to the Clinton-Sherman Air Force Base. The project will also provide substantial flood control benefits, in addition to its recreation and wildlife features.

Commissioner Dominy said that the Bureau of Reclamation is transferring the development, administration and operation of approximately 8,200 acres in the upper portion of Foss Reservoir to Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife for use as the Washita National Wildlife Refuge.

Basic recreational facilities, now under construction by the Bureau of Reclamation will be managed by the Foss Reservoir Master Conservancy District without cost to the United States under the District's repayment contract, executed in 1958.

In 1960, the Department of the Interior and the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission executed an agreement which made available to the State of Oklahoma lands and water areas in Fort Cobb Reservoir, in Caddo County, Oklahoma, for wildlife conservation purposes. Fort Cobb Reservoir, with a capacity of 142,600 acre-feet, and Fort Cobb Dam were completed in 1959.

The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife estimates that during peak migration periods as many as 200,000 ducks and 25,000 geese may be expected to stop over at the Washita National Wildlife Refuge during their migrations over the Great Plains States. The refuge is expected to be host to considerable numbers of other birds throughout the year.

Commissioner Dominy cited the Washita Basin Project as "a pertinent example of national and local benefits being provided under the Bureau of Reclamation's multipurpose development of water resources in the West to serve the long-term needs of our growing population."

x x x